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Letter dated 21 October 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to convey herewith the fourth report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism.

I should be grateful if the present letter and the report could be brought to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

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Letter dated 21 October 2016 from the Leadership Panel of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism addressed to the Secretary-General

The Leadership Panel of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism has the honour to transmit the Mechanism's fourth report pursuant to Security Council resolution 2235 (2015).

(*Signed*) Virginia **Gamba**
Head
Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism
(*Signed*) Adrian **Neritani**
Leadership Panel

(*Signed*) Eberhard **Schanze**
Leadership Panel

Fourth report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the fourth report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism pursuant to Security Council resolution 2235 (2015). It covers the period from 20 August 2016, when the Mechanism's third report (S/2016/738/Rev.1) was submitted to the Security Council, to 19 October 2016.

II. Background

2. The Mechanism was established with a mandate to identify to the greatest extent feasible individuals, entities, groups or Governments who were perpetrators, organizers, sponsors or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons, including chlorine or any other toxic chemical, in the Syrian Arab Republic where the OPCW fact-finding mission determined or had determined that a specific incident in the Syrian Arab Republic had involved or had likely involved the use of chemicals as weapons.

3. The Mechanism began its activities with the appointment of the Leadership Panel on 24 September 2015. In accordance with paragraphs 6 and 9 of Security Council resolution 2235 (2015), various agreements were concluded concerning the work of the Mechanism, including with OPCW and the Syrian Arab Republic. Pursuant to paragraph 10 of the resolution, the Secretary-General, in his letter dated 9 November addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2015/854), informed the Council that the Mechanism would begin its full operations on 13 November.

4. The Mechanism's mandate was implemented in two phases. The first, pertaining to information collection and planning for case development, consisted of reviewing and analysing the mission's data, mapping the incidents and developing an investigation plan and methodology. The Mechanism also began to collect information and evidence not obtained or prepared by the mission that was deemed to be relevant to its mandate (non-mission sources), including information from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic, other Member States, individual groups and entities and open sources. At the end of the first phase, the Mechanism informed the Security Council of the following nine cases of use of chemicals as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic to be investigated:

(a) Kafr Zita, Hama governorate, 11 April 2014;

(b) Kafr Zita, Hama governorate, 18 April 2014;

(c) Talmenes, Idlib governorate, 21 April 2014;

(d) Al-Tamanah, Idlib governorate, 29 and 30 April 2014;

(e) Al-Tamanah, Idlib governorate, 25 and 26 May 2014;

(f) Qmenas, Idlib governorate, 16 March 2015;

(g) Sarmin, Idlib governorate, 16 March 2015;

(h) Binnish, Idlib governorate, 24 March 2015;

(i) Marea, Aleppo governorate, 21 August 2015.

5. Following the identification of those nine cases, the Mechanism began its second phase (case investigation), which consisted of in-depth analysis of the cases and continued until sufficient relevant information had been gathered, analysed, assessed and corroborated to allow it to present its findings to the Security Council.

6. The Mechanism was not mandated to act and function as a judicial or quasi-judicial body. Moreover, it has no authority or jurisdiction, whether directly or indirectly, to make a formal or binding judicial determination of criminal liability. The Mechanism functioned as a non-judicial investigative body within its mandate, identifying "to the greatest extent feasible" individuals and other actors involved in the use of chemicals as weapons and the roles that they played. It accordingly developed its own standards, as indicated in annex I to its third report.

7. The Leadership Panel decided that, in reporting its findings to the Security Council, a sufficient degree of supporting evidence was required — that is, there is evidence of a credible and reliable nature to determine that a party was involved in the use of chemicals as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic (see also S/2016/142, enclosure, sect. III, and S/2016/738/Rev.1, annex I).

8. The Leadership Panel, to implement a systematic approach in making the assessments, decided on key elements that the investigation would seek to establish for each case: (a) date and time; (b) weather conditions; (c) impact location; (d) munition (e.g., remnants); (e) delivery method (e.g., means and direction); (f) damage and effects (e.g., on buildings, the environment, flora and fauna); and (g) medical effects. The Mechanism aimed to corroborate all information and, as necessary, information was subjected to a separate analytical process, including through forensic analysis. In those cases in which key elements could be established consistently, the Panel reached a conclusion on the actors involved.

9. During the investigation, the Mechanism reviewed and analysed the fact-finding mission information, in addition to the information and material that it had collected. This included more than 8,500 pages of documents, transcripts of more than 200 interviews, over 950 pieces of photographic material, more than 450 videos obtained from open sources and provided by witnesses, approximately 330 pages of forensic analysis and 3,500 multimedia files. The most pertinent material was, after initial analysis by the Mechanism, further analysed by four internationally recognized forensic and defence institutes.

10. On this basis and as reflected in its third report, the Leadership Panel determined that there was sufficient information on three cases investigated to reach a conclusion as to the actors involved. The cases were Talmenes (21 April 2014), Sarmin (16 March 2015) and Marea (21 August 2015). Furthermore, the information and evidence collected in relation to three other cases investigated were deemed not to reach the level of sufficiency required for the Panel to reach a conclusion as to

the actors involved. The cases were Kafr Zita (11 April 2014) and Al-Tamanah (29 and 30 April and 25 and 26 May 2014).

III. Assessments, findings and conclusions

11. At the time of submission of its third report, information and evidence on the remaining three cases — Kafr Zita (18 April 2014), Qmenas (16 March 2015) and Binnish (24 March 2015) — were still being analysed by forensic laboratories.

12. In relation to those cases, the Mechanism received and analysed additional information, including the results of forensic analysis that had been requested before the submission of its third report. It had also carried out interviews that had not been analysed at the time of submission of that report.

13. The Leadership Panel outlined in the Mechanism's third report common elements relating to the use of chlorine or a chlorine derivative as a weapon, to be read in conjunction with the specific findings. It also outlined some of the challenges of the investigation, such as that the incidents investigated occurred more than two years ago, between April 2014 and August 2015, that the Mechanism could not undertake field visits owing to the security situation on the ground and that it was investigating the use of a toxic chemical that was widely available in the Syrian Arab Republic.

14. Taking these common elements into account and having analysed additional information received, the Leadership Panel arrived at the findings, assessments and conclusions set out below.

Kafr Zita, Hama governorate, 18 April 2014

15. The Leadership Panel, having examined the information and evidence regarding the incident in Kafr Zita on 18 April 2014, previously determined that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces had executed air strikes in that area on that day. The Panel could not, however, confirm the use of barrel bombs because the remnants of the device allegedly used had been removed and could not be linked with certainty to impact location No. 2, previously identified in annex III to the third report.

16. The Leadership Panel, having reviewed all the information obtained during the reporting period, could not provide further clarity on the remnants of the device and its possible connection to impact location No. 2, nor could it reach a conclusion as to whether the toxic chemicals had been released as a result of the use by the Syrian Arab Armed Forces of a conventional weapon or weapons that had interacted with toxic chemicals on the ground or whether the munition itself had contained toxic chemicals.

17. Accordingly, the Leadership Panel determines that the status of this case remains unchanged.

Qmenas, Idlib governorate, 16 March 2015

18. The Leadership Panel, having examined the information regarding the incident in Qmenas on 16 March 2015, previously determined that a Syrian Arab Armed Forces helicopter had dropped a barrel bomb or other device at impact location

No. 1 in Qmenas, identified in annex VII to the third report. Although the Panel was close to having sufficient information to reach a conclusion on the actors involved at the time of submission of the third report, it could not confirm whether the device used had contained explosives or chlorine.

19. The Leadership Panel determines that there is now sufficient information to conclude that the incident at impact location No. 1 was caused by a Syrian Arab Armed Forces helicopter dropping a device from high altitude, which hit the ground and released the toxic substance that affected the population.

20. This conclusion is based on the following additional assessments:

- Two witnesses, who indicated having been a short distance away from location No. 1 at the time of the impact, reported a foul or strong odour that emerged immediately after the impact of a device that had been dropped from a helicopter. The witnesses also reported eye and skin irritation, a feeling of suffocation and coughing.
- This testimony was consistent with information concerning the patients who arrived on the evening of 16 March 2015 in the Sarmin hospital from Qmenas showing symptoms relating to chlorine exposure. They also reported that the clothes of those who arrived at the hospital smelled of chlorine.
- Witnesses who visited impact location No. 1 described the remnants and reported discolouration of vegetation at the location. The discolouration visible on the photographs taken at impact location No. 1 was confirmed by forensic analysis. Furthermore, a vegetation index analysis using satellite pictures showed a patch of less healthy vegetation at that location.
- In addition to the witness statements and information from other sources regarding a helicopter flying over Qmenas at the time of the incident, analysis by a defence research institute of the photographs showing the remnants and the impact location found that the crater was likely to have been caused by a device dropped from a high altitude, possibly more than 1,000 m, on to a hard surface. Such a flight would have been in the coverage area of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces radar.
- The Leadership Panel reiterates that, having reviewed all the information gathered, it found no evidence that armed opposition groups in Qmenas had been operating a helicopter at the time and location of the incident.

Binnish, Idlib governorate, 24 March 2015

21. The Leadership Panel, having examined the information regarding the incident in Binnish on 24 March 2015, previously confirmed the existence of a canister with traces of chlorine or a chlorine-like substance. At the time of submission of the third report, the Mechanism was awaiting information and the forensic analysis of material received in order to clarify certain inconsistencies in the information before it.

22. The Leadership Panel reviewed and analysed additional information and the results of forensic analysis, including metadata of media files, and determined that the inconsistencies previously identified were due to the existence of more than one event occurring in close sequence from 23 to 25 March 2015. The events included

repeated Syrian air force overflights and air strikes on Binnish during the battle for Idlib in March 2015.

23. Additional witness statements and image analysis corroborated that a canister with traces of chlorine had been found in Binnish. The exact time and location could not be established, however. The canister could also not be linked to any of several incident locations identified:

- Forensic analysis of a photograph showing a smoke plume concluded that the plume was located at the coordinates N35.955286° E36.717797°, previously identified as impact location No. 1 (see annex IX to the third report). The plume is assessed to have resulted from an air strike with explosives, which most likely occurred during the afternoon of 25 March 2015.
- As indicated in annex IX to the third report, impact location No. 2 could not be established.
- Another location, No. 3, was identified. It is some 150 m from location No. 1. The following information was obtained about this location:
  - There were remnants of a barrel bomb consisting of intact canisters, a plastic bottle and an outer jacket. However, no crater could be observed.
  - Forensic analysis of photographs and satellite imagery of the location showed discolouration of vegetation and was consistent with witness statements about the state of the vegetation at the location. Forensic analysis also showed that the dispersion pattern seen through the discolouration of the vegetation pointed to toxic chemicals as the cause.
- There was an impact location No. 4, located 180 m to the east of the location where the remnants were found. However, forensic analysis determined that impact location No. 4 was not linked to the remnants found at location No. 3.

24. This additional information notwithstanding, inconsistencies remained. Accordingly, the Leadership Panel determines that the status of the case remains unchanged.

IV. Summary of findings and overall comments regarding case assessments

Summary of findings

25. In the third report, the Leadership Panel reached a conclusion as to the actors involved in three of the nine cases investigated by the Mechanism: Talmenes (21 April 2014), Sarmin (16 March 2015) and Marea (21 August 2015). As discussed above, the Panel has also reached a conclusion as to the actors involved in the incident in Qmenas on 16 March 2015.

26. The Leadership Panel determined in the third report that Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) had been involved in the use of sulfur mustard in Marea on 21 August 2015. The Panel concluded that ISIL had conducted an attack on Marea using several artillery shells filled with sulfur mustard, a chemical weapon.

27. The Leadership Panel also determined, in the third report and in section III above, that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces had been involved in the use of toxic chemicals as weapons in three cases: Talmenes (21 April 2014), Qmenas (16 March 2015) and Sarmin (16 March 2015). Their helicopters were used to drop barrel bombs in those three cases.

28. During the period in which the incidents under investigation occurred, the Syrian Arab Armed Forces possessed a fleet of rotary-wing aircraft, including transport and combat helicopters, used by the air force and the navy. Furthermore, the Mechanism obtained information that those helicopters could also be accessed by Syrian special forces. The information gathered by the Mechanism further indicated that, in addition to the relocation of air assets owing to the loss of some of the airbases to armed opposition groups, there were constant movements of helicopters from one airbase to another, based on operational needs, in particular of operations on the ground. Air assets have been known to undertake missions from airbases that were not necessarily their permanent base.

29. The helicopter flights in the three cases originated from two government-controlled airbases, as follows:

- Hama airbase, Hama governorate. In the case of Talmenes, the information assessed by the Panel indicates that a helicopter departed from Hama airbase, flew over Talmenes at the time of the incident and dropped a barrel bomb, as indicated in annex IV to the third report.
- Humaymim airbase at Bassel al-Assad International Airport, Ladhiqiyah governorate. In the cases of Qmenas and Sarmin, information assessed by the Panel indicates that two consecutive helicopters, with pilots using call signs beginning with "Bravo", departed from this airbase, flew over Qmenas and Sarmin, respectively, at the times of the incidents and dropped barrel bombs, as indicated in annexes VII and VIII to the third report.

30. The 253 and 255 squadrons, both belonging to the Sixty-third Helicopter Brigade, which were formerly based at Taftanaz, were relocated to the Hama and Humaymim airbases. In addition, the 618 squadron, with navy helicopters, was based at the Humaymim airbase.

31. On 10 October 2016, the Leadership Panel received from the Syrian Arab Republic extensive comments (S/2016/844) on its third report. The Panel notes with interest that the communication contains a reference to an internal investigation being carried out by the Syrian national committee. According to the communication, the committee conducted a thorough study (technical and legal) and reviewed the flight plans and air operations in some of the areas under investigation by the Mechanism, specifically referring to the Hama and Humaymim airbases.

32. This is of particular interest because the Mechanism was previously informed that no such flight plans and information relating to air operations existed. Having been informed of the internal investigation, the Leadership Panel has again formally requested the Government to provide the names of the specific Syrian Arab Armed Forces units and any entity outside the Armed Forces from whom the national committee received the flight plans and information relating to air operations. A

reply to this request has not yet been received. Such information is of great importance, given that commanders are responsible for any assets under their control.

33. Most of the helicopter assets at the Hama and Humaymim airbases at the time of the incidents belonged to the Sixty-third Helicopter Brigade. The Mechanism collected information on the Syrian Arab Armed Forces command structure. The Leadership Panel could not, however, confirm the names of the individuals who had command and control of the helicopter squadrons at the time.

34. In five other cases — Kafr Zita (11 and 18 April 2014), Al-Tamanah (29 and 30 April and 25 and 26 May 2014) and Binnish (24 March 2015) — the Leadership Panel assessed, in the third report and in section III above, that the information obtained and analysed did not allow for the identification of actors involved owing to inconsistencies that could not be resolved.

Overall comments regarding case assessments

35. The Leadership Panel, pursuant to paragraphs 5, 7 and 8 of Security Council resolution 2235 (2015), requested and collected information from all its sources, including on the prevailing situation at the time of the cases investigated and the infrastructure, organizational structure and assets of the Government, armed opposition groups and terrorist groups[1] that would assist the Panel's assessments. This information was requested, in particular for Hama, Idlib and Aleppo governorates, for the period between March 2014 and August 2015.

36. The Mechanism requested the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to supply information concerning its armed forces, more specifically:

(a) The command and organizational structure of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces, including the air force and the army;

(b) Operations undertaken by the Syrian Arab Armed Forces on the dates and times and at the locations of the incidents under investigation, including information on the reporting of operations;

(c) The location of its forces on the dates under investigation;

(d) The status of the military bases and assets on the dates of the incidents investigated, as well as aircraft and ammunition seized by terrorist groups and armed opposition groups from bases no longer controlled by the Government, and how the military assets from those bases were relocated;

(e) Documents such as rules of engagement, military doctrine, flight logs, situation reports and pre-mission and post-mission assessments and memorandums.

37. The Government provided information on, among other things, general air and ground operations at or near the locations investigated on the dates of the incidents, in addition to information on the status of military bases and assets, including those that it no longer controlled. In relation to the Taftanaz (Idlib governorate) and Jarrah (Aleppo governorate) airbases, both of which were not under government control at the time of the incidents, the Government provided a detailed list of equipment and

[1] On 30 May 2013, ISIL and the Nusrah Front were designated as terrorist groups by the Security Council under resolution 1267 (1999).

other assets lost, including operational and non-operational aircraft and consumables such as fuel, together with a list of missing and defected officers. Some of this information was included in the Mechanism's third report, in particular the annexes. Citing national security concerns, the Government did not provide information on the command and organizational structure of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces or the order of battle for its air force and army as it was in 2014 and 2015.

38. In relation to the Syrian air force, the Government informed the Mechanism that its helicopter fleet undertook various missions, such as transporting payloads and ordnance, rescuing and transporting injured persons, providing air support to the operations of ground forces, engaging in combat operations and conducting reconnaissance. The missions were undertaken when the air force received requests from many different sources, including the army and civilians. No detailed planning was undertaken before such support missions, which were executed immediately. In this regard, although pre-mission and post-mission assessments existed before the conflict, no longer were there situation reports or post-operation memorandums. Only a verbal post-mission evaluation and assessment was provided by the pilot to the direct commander. Documentation was prepared only in the event of damage to aircraft, as well as when transporting injured victims or dropping humanitarian aid, pursuant to a decision of the airbase commander or the immediate commander.

39. The Government informed the Mechanism that the army had situation reports on ground operations of significance, such as instances of material losses or injuries. The army stated that it used only conventional weapons and provided information on its doctrine on procedures for protection against toxic chemicals. It confirmed that it had no separate fleet of helicopters and did not keep an updated inventory of its ammunition, although it did record losses in the situation reports.

40. The Mechanism also requested the Government to arrange meetings with those army, air force and air force intelligence commanders, as well as the commanders of the Hama and Humaymim airbases, serving at the time of the incident. The Government was unable to arrange for the Mechanism to meet the commanders. It did, however, make available two generals, one from the army and one from the air force, who provided broad responses on the existing procedures in their respective forces.

41. As indicated in the third report, in a number of cases investigated by the Mechanism, the Government informed the Mechanism that "terrorist groups" had had possession of and transported toxic chemicals, including chlorine, for use as weapons. The Government also informed the Mechanism that its armed forces, in some cases, had targeted locations in which those groups were storing toxic chemicals. In that connection, the Mechanism requested further information and clarity from the Government, in particular with regard to the alleged possession, transportation and storage of toxic chemicals by the groups. The Government did not provide further information, citing national security concerns.

V. Other issues

Information management

42. The Leadership Panel previously reported that the Mechanism had implemented a records management system within a robust information security regime to ensure appropriate protection for the information in its possession. This system is set out in full in the annex to the present report. It includes the type and classification of information held by the Mechanism and its content and records management system. The information and evidence collected by the Mechanism is being prepared for submission to the Secretary-General for storage and archival preservation.

Offices

43. The Mechanism closed its office in The Hague on 23 September 2016, given that the investigations into the three cases had been completed by that date. The extension period was used for the completion of its report, including a review and analysis of the information material and the Leadership Panel's assessment, at the New York office. The Mechanism also closed its liaison office in Damascus, maintaining exchanges with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic through the office in New York via the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations.

Staffing

44. At its full capacity, the Mechanism's core staff, including the Leadership Panel, the Chief of Staff and the head of the Mechanism's office in The Hague, consisted of 22 Professional staff from 16 countries. It also had seven consultants, including translators.

Voluntary contributions

45. The Mechanism received voluntary contributions from 12 Member States in support of its activities.

VI. Concluding remarks

46. As indicated in its third report, the Mechanism, in line with its authority under resolution 2235 (2015), relied on the voluntary submission of information. Thus, the Mechanism was as strong as the information that it was able to collect and corroborate.

47. Within the time frame allotted, the Leadership Panel identified the actors involved to the greatest extent feasible in four of the nine cases that it investigated.

48. In June 2016, the Mechanism, in its second report (S/2016/530), informed the Security Council of its volume of work and gave an indication as to the time required to investigate the various layers of perpetration, in addition to finding sponsors, organizers and those otherwise involved.

49. The Leadership Panel reiterates that alternative information collection efforts and investigative skills would be required to understand and establish the link

between the actors identified by the Panel and the individual perpetrators and their chain of command, as well as sponsors and organizers.

50. As reflected in its third report, the Mechanism requested information concerning the production, possession and movement of chlorine by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. It also looked into the possession and movement of chlorine by terrorist groups, in particular the Nusrah Front, and armed opposition groups, given that a major chlorine production facility had been taken over by the Nusrah Front in August 2012.

51. The Leadership Panel notes with grave concern that, during the reporting period, the Mechanism received 13 allegations of possession, movement and/or intent of use of toxic substances, including chemical weapons, by non-State actors in the Syrian Arab Republic. They were referred to the OPCW technical secretariat.

52. The Leadership Panel reiterates once again its strong conviction that the use of chemicals as weapons, for any reason and under any circumstances, is totally abhorrent. The Panel also reaffirms its belief that it is crucial to hold those who use or intend to use chemicals as weapons accountable for their acts, given that it is fundamental to deter all those who continue to believe that there is something to be gained from the use of toxic chemicals as weapons. No reason can justify their use or intent of use as weapons by anybody, anywhere. If individuals, groups, entities or Governments perceive these weapons to be useful tools, no matter the costs, proliferation will ensue. The Panel therefore believes that those with effective control in the military units referred to in paragraph 30 of the present report must be held accountable. Accountability must also be applied to others responsible for the use of chemicals as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

53. The Leadership Panel conveys its appreciation for the cooperation received from Member States and other entities in support of its work to date, including the generous financial contributions received.

54. Lastly, the Leadership Panel expresses its appreciation for the support received from the United Nations Secretariat, in particular the Office for Disarmament Affairs, and from the OPCW technical secretariat in delivering its mandate.

Annex

Information management by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism

1. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, in accordance with the letter dated 27 August 2015 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2015/669) containing the elements of the terms of reference of the Mechanism, safeguarded its documents and evidence to ensure the integrity and confidentiality of its work. To this end, the Mechanism developed and implemented a records management system within a robust information security regime applied to all the information that it obtained or generated in the conduct of its work. In setting up the regime, confidentiality and security requirements deemed necessary for the storage and use of the information material provided to the Mechanism by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) fact-finding mission were taken into account. Access to confidential information was on a need-to-know basis.

2. The Mechanism concluded a memorandum of understanding with OPCW on 26 November 2015 concerning the provision of access, storage and handling of information. All personnel were required to enter into individual confidentiality undertakings. In addition, the Mechanism conducted its work in accordance with the Secretary-General's bulletin on information sensitivity, classification and handling (ST/SGB/2007/6) and the relevant sections of the Secretary-General's bulletin on record-keeping and the management of United Nations archives (ST/SGB/2007/5), concerning the creation, management and disposition of records.

Standard operating procedure on information management

3. The Mechanism, in consultation with the Archives and Records Management Section of the Department of Management, developed and implemented a standard operating procedure for information management. All personnel were required to follow the information-handling instructions contained therein. The effective handling of information was seen as central to the Mechanism's ability to fulfil its mandate as it would assist in ensuring the safety and security of the Mechanism's activities, personnel and third parties, strengthening the integrity of its records and evidence, better supporting timely information retrieval, analysis and dissemination and encouraging a culture of confidentiality and promoting the correct handling of records and evidence.

4. The standard operating procedure covered all information material, including records and evidence generated, received and handled by the Mechanism. Special emphasis was laid on material classified as confidential and strictly confidential.

5. The standard operating procedure outlined measures relating to office and physical security to protect the information material stored and handled by the Mechanism. It further detailed the Mechanism's registry, the central repository for its records, including procedures for access, based on roles and responsibilities, to its contents. It highlighted the importance of preserving the chain of custody for evidence in its possession, in particular the maintenance of the evidence audit trail. It

also covered subjects relating to electronic records, such as creating, reproducing, scanning, transmitting and sharing records, using external storage devices and cloud-sharing platforms, using e-mail and shared drives and having a clean-desk policy.

6. One portion of the standard operating procedure was dedicated to evidence storage and handling procedures. It referred to the appointment of an evidence custodian and securing evidence through the use of evidence vaults and containers meeting environmental and security requirements. It also outlined the procedures for personnel to follow when deployed to the field and procedures upon return, in particular the registration of evidence collected. Furthermore, detailed procedures were outlined for transporting records and evidence.

Types and classification of information held by the Mechanism

7. The information held by the Mechanism was divided into three security classifications: unclassified, confidential and strictly confidential.

8. The following types of records were classified as strictly confidential or confidential:

(a) Correspondence and information received from Member States;

(b) Witness statements;

(c) Material received from witnesses or through third parties;

(d) Information received from OPCW, including information and evidence obtained by the fact-finding mission;

(e) Reports from forensic and defence institutes, including forensic and defence analysis;

(f) Information received from external bodies on a confidential basis;

(g) Satellite imagery and analysis;

(h) Internal working documents of the Mechanism, including investigation plans, case files, analysis, assessments and minutes of meetings;

(i) Administrative, personnel and financial records.

9. Unclassified information mainly consists of open-source material collected by the Mechanism and other publicly available material.

Content and records management system

10. The information held by the Mechanism is in three types of media: electronic records; certified copies of records of the fact-finding mechanism; and physical records, such as paper, compact discs, digital videodiscs, secure digital cards and other storage devices.

Unite Docs

11. The Mechanism established an enterprise content management system through the use of an internal web-based platform called "Unite Docs", which was customized for document creation, sharing and storage. The use of that system

allowed for records management capabilities through a seamless integration with a records management system. It also allowed for secure collaboration between the offices in New York and The Hague by enabling secure access for all personnel to the documents stored using this platform.

12. All electronic information collected or generated by the Mechanism was stored in Unite Docs, unless otherwise arranged or requested by the records originator.

13. In the case of paper records, originals were scanned and uploaded to Unite Docs, unless otherwise requested by the records originator. Physical evidence not permitted to be scanned was entered in the system as "metadata only" (excluding information regarding the physical evidence that might compromise its confidentiality), in order for it to be registered and tracked in the system.

14. Through the use of permission settings, access to confidential documents placed on Unite Docs by the Mechanism's personnel was restricted as deemed appropriate by the Leadership Panel. In addition, the auditing and tracking of confidential material being read and written were enabled to keep a record of the personnel accessing and making changes to the material. Furthermore, no users except the records manager were permitted to delete records and evidence to ensure that no records of the Mechanism were deleted from the system and lost.

15. Unite Docs was implemented in compliance with the United Nations policies on information security and certified for storage of strictly confidential material (the highest security classification in the United Nations) by the Global Security and Architecture Section of the Office of Information and Communications Technology. The system can be accessed only within the United Nations network and all information marked as confidential or above was encrypted in the file store (network-attached storage).

16. The Mechanism's personnel were trained in the use of the system and briefed about security and confidentiality measures taken to protect the information material.

Air-gapped network (not connected to the Internet or to any other computer network)

17. This isolated network was located in the office in The Hague and consisted of a dedicated server with two terminals used to consult material, which could not be copied or printed, placed on the file server. The terminals had no Wi-Fi cards and their universal serial bus ports were disabled. Logging capabilities kept records of who consulted the material and when.

18. Material on the server included the forensic copies of the fact-finding mission information and evidence provided by OPCW, witness statements with identifiable names or information and other highly sensitive documents.

Paper records

19. A small quantity of material was available only in hard copy by request of the records originator. The originals are stored in New York and copies, if any, were numbered and tracked. The Mechanism's investigators were able to review the paper material upon request and followed a chain of custody regime to ensure that access to the material was properly recorded.